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Neither Globalized nor Glocalized: Fuguet's or Lemebel's Metropolis?

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Malaysia, it seems, has fallen prey to that infernal postcolonial disease called rapid and uneven development, where the rulers who have come to power are bent on "teaching a lesson" to their ex-Colonial masters by imitating everything that the "evil West" has done but on larger, gaudier and more vulgar terms. If they make microchips, so will we – except ours will be the biggest in the world (Farish A. Noor 10).¹

At times, one is under the impression that the same hubris that Farish Noor observes in Malaysian political life has been present in much of Latin American history, i.e. the imperious desire not only to "catch up" at whatever cost but to supersede the model, be it Europe or the United States. What struck me most about Noor's acerbic comment, however, was how easily it could be applied to Chile, the so-called Latin American "exception," concerning its recent economic development.² It immediately made me think of 1992, when Chile, to leave no doubts whatsoever that the Pinochet dictatorship was over and, above all, to prove to the rest of the world that it was a modern country, not only transported an iceberg from the Antarctic for display in the World Expo in Seville but, unlike the other Latin American countries at the event, it had its own separate stand. Chile has often been hailed as the "Asian Tiger" of Latin America. Everywhere one goes these days, in fact, people express satisfaction at Chile's well-being. In *Globalización, desarrollo y democracia: Chile en el contexto mundial* (2005), Manuel Castells provides a lucid analysis of the country's positive strides in the economic, social and political spheres in the last fifteen years. Undeniably, Chile has made significant progress. Since Patricio Aylwin came to power in 1990, levels of extreme poverty have diminished. Concerning the violation of human rights during Pinochet's dictatorship, both the Rettig and the Valech Commissions made some humble advances and as a result, a small number of those implicated in the deaths and disappearance of hundreds of political prisoners are now serving jail terms. New roads have been built and the subway system in Santiago continues to add new routes. The number of foreigners who go to Chile in search of a better life continues to grow. Indubitably, the country's imitation of the model would seemingly be a success: an unencumbered free market economy, privatized services, the "mallification of commerce"³ and the concomitant spreading of malls, tall buildings and gigantic grocery stores, the ever-increasing arrival of foreign investment, etc. When Michelle Bachelet assumes power on March 11, 2006, she will receive an economically healthy country.⁴

Nonetheless, much remains to be done. In its rush to accommodate global forces, in its alacrity to "let bygones be bygones,"⁵ in its dying to be a developed country no matter what, Chile does not want to admit that there is a "pueblo enfermo"⁶ in its midst. Magazines such as *Revista de crítica cultural*, *Rocinante* and *The Clinic*, critics such as Nelly Richards, Tomás Moulián and Raquel Olea, and writers

¹ Noor's essay from which this quote is taken is called "Sultan Iskandar Dzulkarnain's *Mega-Projek*," pp. 9-14.

² In a study on the health of Chile's economy which has just been published, a German institute offers the following prognosis for what is left of 2005: "Los positivos pronósticos de Chile reflejan la sólida situación económica del país, con exportaciones crecientes, fuertes gastos de capital, consumo privado y un número de inversiones extranjeras en aumento." See "Estudio alemán."

³ I borrow this expression from Richard Young's article, "Buenos Aires and the Narration of Urban Spaces and Practices."

⁴ For a well-balanced and well-researched view of the various political, economic and social factors which have led to Chile's present state of affairs, as well as for the challenges that await the country in the future and the panacea to overcome them, see Eugenio Tironi's *El sueño chileno* (2005).

⁵ Here I am thinking of the fact that neither the issue of the "detenido-desaparecidos" nor the matter of the privatization of public industries during Pinochet's dictatorship has been completely clarified. On the latter point, consult María Olivia Mönckeberg's detailed study, *El saqueo de los Grupos Económicos al Estado chileno* (2001).

⁶ I take this name from Alcides Arguedas famous essay *Pueblo enfermo* (1909).

such as Diamela Eltit and Carmen Berenguer, among others, have shown and continue to show the many social *aporias* that still afflict the country. Studies by the United Nations and other organizations indicate that Chile's distribution of wealth is one of the most unequal in the world.⁷ Other studies demonstrate that a great majority of Chileans suffer from stress and are among the people who stay the longest at the office without necessarily producing more. Increasingly, people are afraid of venturing downtown and there are more and more gated-communities across the city. Investigative reporting in Chile is still a dangerous occupation, particularly when it affects members of the government. The unemployment rate remains high and so does the country's informal economy. Santiago, for its part, still becomes inundated every time there are heavy rains, making it difficult to carry out one's activities and damaging greatly the homes of the poor.

Now then, the goal of this article is not so much to ascertain how Noor's critical assessment of Malaysia's frantic "rapid and uneven development" fits Chile or other Latin American countries undergoing the same type of "keeping up with the Joneses" at whatever cost. Instead, I am interested in examining how globalization is having an impact in narrative representation and especially in verifying whether writers embrace or reject global forces and how they do so. Specifically, this article examines both the dilution and the rescuing of "the own" within the parameters of the contemporary Latin America capital city by focusing its attention on very recent literary and theoretical discourses produced in the continent. The incessant influx of novels, short-stories, urban chronicles and other texts into the market occasioned by multinational publishing houses makes it impossible to provide a comprehensive view of literary representation of the Latin American metropolis in this article. I begin by discussing briefly the ideas of Néstor García Canclini, Beatriz Sarlo and Renato Ortiz regarding identity and globalization, and I move to the analysis of the works of Alberto Fuguet (1964) and Pedro Lemebel (circa 1955). Before the analysis *per se*, however, I provide some short notes on the Latin American city in general and Santiago in particular.

As theoretical framework, I utilize two concepts, "globalization" and "glocalization." Simply put, "globalization" is the process by means of which the global overwhelms the local; and "glocalization," in my opinion an unlikely situation overall -- at least in most poor and developing nations --, one in which the global and the local compete on an equal footing.⁸ These two terms, similarly, are related to concepts such as *lo propio* ("the own"), *lo ajeno* ("the foreign"),⁹ "identity," "the local" and "the global," as was recently demonstrated in an interdisciplinary conference on the subject of "Architecture and Identity" celebrated in Berlin.¹⁰ One of the major sources for the *lo propio/lo ajeno* debate now taking place in many areas of life in the context of globalization is an essay published by the late Paul Ricoeur in his 1955 book *Histoire et vérité* called "Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales." The French philosopher points to the advent of a world civilization which, though a positive development in his view, might at the same time debilitate national cultures: "L'humanité ... entre dans une unique civilisation planétaire qui représente à la fois un progrès gigantesque pour tous et une tâche écrasante de survie et d'adaptation de l'héritage culturel à ce cadre nouveau" (286). The presence of a "développement des techniques" (287), a "politique rationnelle" (288) and an "économie rationnelle universelle" (289) have spawned, of necessity, a new *modus vivendi* the world over: "Enfin, on peut dire qu'il se développe à

⁷ Only in fifteen other nations -- among a total of 127 -- is income more unequally distributed than in Chile, according to a recent study by the World Bank. See Varas C.

⁸ These terms come from George Ritzer's study on globalization.

⁹ Throughout this study I shall keep the Spanish translation of "the own" and "the foreign." Some authors, for example Ricardo Salvatore in "Re-pensar el imperialismo en la era de la globalización," prefer the pair "autóctono/extranjero" (15). I have opted for the dichotomy "propio/ajeno" because I deem it more appropriate when examining cultural phenomena in the milieu of globalization.

¹⁰ A first version of this article -- "A Tale of Two Cities: Competing Literary Visions for Contemporary Latin American Architecture" -- was presented at this conference and is due to appear in a book (published by Jovis [Berlin], www.jovis.de) in April, 2006. The present article constitutes an expanded version of what I read first in Berlin (December 7, 2004) and then in Lexington, KY (April 22, 2005) at the KFLC.

travers le monde un genre de vie également universel” (289). But more than offering a solution to the dilemma of either embracing the behemoth of a “civilization planétaire” or fighting it tooth and nail, choosing to preserve one’s own traditions or abandoning them for the sake of being modern, Ricoeur poses the issue as a paradox:

Il faut d’une part se réenraciner dans son passé, se refaire une âme nationale et dresser cette revendication spirituelle et culturelle face à la personnalité du colonisateur. Mais il faut en même temps, pour entrer dans la civilisation moderne, entrer dans la rationalité scientifique, technique, politique qui exige bien souvent l’abandon pur et simple de tout un passé culturel. C’est un fait: toute culture ne peut supporter et absorber le choc de la civilisation mondiale. Voilà le paradoxe: comment se moderniser, et retourner aux sources? Comment réveiller une vieille culture endormie et entrer dans la civilisation universelle? (293)

To a great degree, this is the same predicament confronting many countries in Latin America today: how to maintain one’s national identity in the face of globalization.

As a Latin American living in the United States, I find that it is not always easy to have a clear idea of what is going on in the Latin American city today, no matter how frequently I return. Greater numbers of people have cellular phones and there are more and more mega supermarkets and malls everywhere in the city, especially in Chile, but the rest of life, its “intrahistoria,” so to speak, would seem to remain pretty much the same. Then there is the issue of which city one visits, San Salvador or Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires or La Paz, Rio de Janeiro or Mexico City. Consequently, my major questions in this study are: What is the present state of the Latin American metropolis? Whose representation of urban space is closer to the truth, Fuguet’s or Lemebel’s? And, more specifically, is it at all valid to employ concepts such as *lo propio* and *lo ajeno* in the context of cultural identity today? And what about identity?¹¹ Does it make sense anymore, has it ever made sense? One does not have to be an anthropologist or an ethnographer to realize not only that cultures are always already marked by traces of other cultural signs but that despite the efforts of many, essences are perennially beyond the realm of the concrete. Ortiz reminds us, in effect, that “es ilusorio imaginar la memoria nacional como el espacio ontológico de una identidad unívoca” (*Otro territorio* 80). The antinomy *lo propio/lo ajeno* thus seems troublesome, especially as it pertains to Latin America, a hybrid though not a postmodern continent par excellence. However, if we do use constructs such as *lo propio* and *lo ajeno* in the case of Latin America, whose *propio*¹² and whose *ajeno*¹³ do we mean? Both appear as too multifarious of creatures. To speak about identity at the present time might seem a bit anachronistic.

¹¹ I do not know with certainty whether in the era of postpolitics and postnationalism identity continues to be a paramount preoccupation of other areas of culture besides literature. In architecture, for example, one might easily come to a negative conclusion, especially if one observes the increasing presence of so-called “starchitects” and “iconic architecture” around the world. Both “star-chitects” and “iconic architecture” are related to what in architecture has been denominated the “Guggenheim-Bilbao effect.” The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao was designed by the renowned Canadian architect Frank Gehry. Hence, the “Guggenheim-Bilbao effect” has to do with the construction of a building, designed by a “star-chitect,” which places in the map a given city that until then had gone completely unnoticed. In Latin America in particular, there are several architectural projects which have been designed by “star-chitects” in recent years. These projects include designs by three winners of the Pritzker (equivalent to the Nobel in Literature): Hans Hollein in Lima, Zaha Hadid in Mexico and Frank Gehry in Panama. In addition to these, the design project for the first Guggenheim south of the Equator: the Guggenheim-Rio, by the French Jean Nouvel. For a more thorough picture of “star-chitects” as well as “iconic architecture,” see the abstracts of articles by Morgado and Sklair. These can be located in the web page of the conference celebrated in Berlin (www.architecture-identity.de). The articles themselves will come out in the book by Jovis aforementioned.

¹² *Lo propio* of hundreds of ethnic groups that populate the continent, especially Mexico, Guatemala, Peru and Bolivia, who may have symbolic capital in museums and tourist sites but who lack real economic and political capital?; *lo propio* of the needy, a vast majority of whom is too busy trying to make a living?; *lo propio* of the middle class whose standing is ever so precarious in the era of job insecurity created by the free market?; *lo propio* of those who have access to the Internet, cable TV, DVD’s, the GAP, Starbucks and who are able to send their children to private schools?; or *lo propio* of the “foreign local” –

Since the nomenclature *lo propio*, *lo ajeno* and even “identity” appears somewhat rigid and tenuous at the same time, particularly with respect to the contemporary Latin American city in the context of globalization, I prefer the German word *Weltanschauung*, a vocable which in my view is more useful when discussing the impact of globalization on local cultural production. This does not mean that I discard the term “identity.” *Weltanschauung* – literally “view of the world” -- has the liberating effect of placing the subject in the present, of freeing her/himself from the constraints of a fixed identity in order to develop a species of a movable self, a self which is shaped daily, and differently, depending on where it is located and what stimuli it receives. Ortega y Gasset’s well-known dictum “yo soy yo y mi circunstancia” continues to hold true. From this perspective, it could be argued that if Fuguet and Lemebel offer dissimilar diagnoses of Santiago’s urban space, it is because their *Weltanschauung*, their attitudes toward the market, history, culture and the locus from which they write, is also dissimilar.

From García Canclini’s point of view, stubborn efforts to cling to identity are futile in the end. Adhering to the notion that processes of hybridization characterize Latin American life and that communication technologies deterritorialize national cultures,¹⁴ García Canclini would seem to have absolutely no trouble deciding between *lo propio* and *lo ajeno*. In fact, he embraces neither concept. In the struggle between Fuguet’s and Lemebel’s visions, therefore, he would not side with one or the other. More likely, he would take them both out to lunch at the same time. One day the three of them would eat a delicious, fatty hamburger with fries at any of the McDonald’s located in Santiago. And the following day they would have a tasty, healthy stew with fresh vegetables and a nice bottle of Chilean wine in any of the wonderful restaurants that serve traditional Chilean food in the *barrio alto*. For, after all, if one looks closely at the dynamics of any city today, especially in Latin America, “the global” is as much a part of “the local” as “the local” is of “the global.” But, as I wrote above, “the global” is not easy to visualize in the quotidian. In García Canclini’s estimation, in fact, it is in the world of the media where globalization is most discernible.¹⁵ Furthermore, for him the option in Latin America is not to become globalized or to defend identity but to avoid choosing between one or the other. Tremendously important, in his judgment, is “saber qué podemos hacer y ser con los otros, cómo encarar la heterogeneidad, la diferencia y la desigualdad” (*La globalización imaginada* 30). In other words, to go beyond *lo propio* and *lo ajeno* in order to fashion a sort of situational identity, neither globalized nor localized, he would appear to be saying. He is aware that although “las grandes ciudades son espacios para imaginar la globalización y articularla con lo nacional y lo local” (*La globalización* 166), cities are not identical. This means, in his opinion, that in some metropolises – “la megalópolis,” for instance -- it is easier than in others -- “la ciudad emergente” of which Santiago is a sample -- to create a *glocalized* situation. Along these lines, in a recent article he further emphasizes the point that it is long overdue that Latin America escapes the prison-house of “national or regional cultures” (“Cultural Studies” 13). This “deconstruction of nations” to which he makes reference (“Cultural Studies” 18) is not a new phenomenon, of course. To some extent, in *Empire* -- although they are really not referring to Latin America --, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri settled the matter of the so-called disappearance of the nation-state by proclaiming the advent of “Empire” as the new, universal, omnipresent Nation- or better, World-State. This is the locus, in sum, where García Canclini’s identity would ideally be born.

Martí’s contemporary “criollo exótico”--, that ubiquitous being in the Latin American scene who, since the genesis of the Latin American nations, has attempted to fashion his country in the image of either Europe or the United States?

¹³ In reality, *lo ajeno* has always been present in Latin America. Before the consolidation of Aztec, Maya and Inca hegemonies, there were several ethnic groups that at some point in their history were *lo ajeno* to one another. Then came Spaniards, manifold enslaved African ethnic groups, Germans, Italians, Chinese and many others.

¹⁴ In this context, see especially his *Culturas híbridas* and the more recent essay, “Políticas culturales: de las identidades nacionales al espacio latinoamericano.”

¹⁵ Most of my discussion of García Canclini’s viewpoint concerning globalization in this paragraph is based on his specific examination on the subject, *La globalización imaginada*. Chapter seven of this study, “Cultura y política en los imaginarios de la globalización,” is of special relevance to our discussion here.

Beatriz Sarlo, for her part, would no doubt slap Fuguet on the face for endorsing Northamerican culture so wholeheartedly. National culture, national education and, chiefly, the national cultural industry need to be protected from the tentacles of globalization, and intellectuals, writers in particular, have a big responsibility to see that this happens. It is interesting to note that Sarlo published her most famous work to date, *Escenas de la vida posmoderna*, in 1994, when Argentina had not yet received such a tremendous blow to its economy. More interesting yet is the fact that the shopping center, which, as she states in her book, “ha sido construido para reemplazar a la ciudad” (17),¹⁶ became one of the first victims of the citizens-become-consumers as, encouraged by the precipitous fall of the dollar, they stormed shopping centers around the city and stole everything in sight. Metaphorically, the local invaded the global and won a partial battle. In the terrible economic crisis of December 2001 that almost overnight turned a proud Argentina into a close cousin of many of the Latin American countries that it used to despise, the pressures of the local and the forces of the global came face to face.

Focusing most of his analyses on the impact of globalization on culture by using categories such as “space” and “territory,” Ortiz warns us against considering the nation as either “natural” or a “necesidad teleológica”; in fact, in what he calls a “sociedad globalizada” the nation is no longer able to shape social relations precisely because “su territorio es atravesado por fuerzas que la trascienden” (“Diversidad cultural” 37, 50). Globalization weakens the traditional link between culture and physical space and sovereignty ceases to be legitimized by the will of the people (“Globalización y esfera pública” 31, 35). At a moment when global forces would seem to redefine space almost constantly, Ortiz thinks that notions such as “‘nosotros’ y ‘ellos’, ‘cerca’ y ‘lejos’, ‘interno’ y ‘externo’” are also perennially modified. From this perspective, the antinomies “mundial / nacional / local,” as well as the clear distinction between “lo autóctono” and “lo foráneo,” become difficult to sustain (“Globalización y esfera pública” 40-41). In *Otro territorio* (1996), the Brazilian sociologist discusses the existence of a “cultura mundializada” that resides at the very heart of the periphery and “forma parte de nuestra vida cotidiana” (19). Since the onset of globalization brings forth the modification of space as well as the dilution of frontiers, it becomes necessary to think beyond the global/local paradigm. In the end, globalization -- both what he denominates “globalización de las sociedades” and “mundialización de la cultura” (59) --, ought be construed not as something foreign, external to national life, but rather as an “expansión de la modernidad-mundo” (86), especially in Latin America, a continent where, as he declares in a recent article, “modernity is always a project, something to be achieved in the future” (“From Incomplete Modernity to World Modernity” 254).

Historically, the Latin American city is the product of the Spanish city in America which in turn is the result of a horrific act of violence. From the very beginning of the colonizing process, Spaniards wanted to be urban (Rama 15). This meant not only the forced imposition of an order, but also the material destruction of already existing ethnic localities. The colonial period lasted some three hundred years. At the beginning of the 19th Century, anxious to sever the umbilical cord that attached them to Spain, and influenced by the American and French revolutions, the ruling elites began to design a new order, not one based on faith and tradition, but rather on reason and science, at least theoretically. Above all, they wanted to be modern and bring progress and development to the new nations no matter what.¹⁷ To use Barbara Czarniawska’s metaphor, the city became a “laboratory” (2), especially from the second half of the 19th Century on, a period in Latin American history which Jorge Liernur correctly calls “the second conquest” (277). During this time, the new “imagined communities” which became Latin America (Anderson), first assisted by English transportation systems and capital and later by US technologies and services, became propitious spaces for exploitation. The “exporting of American architecture” worldwide to which Jeffrey Cody has recently alluded¹⁸ and which will eventually lead, *mutatis mutandis*, to globalization as the possible end of history, begins in the 1870’s. The members of

¹⁶ The entire quote reads thus: “La ciudad no existe para el shopping, que ha sido construido para reemplazar a la ciudad” (17).

¹⁷ See Alonso’s *The Burden of Modernity* and especially Burns’ *The Poverty of Progress*.

¹⁸ Consult his *Exporting American Architecture, 1870-2000*.

the oligarchy and the nascent Latin American bourgeoisie yearned to be modern. But they did not wish to be American, not yet anyway. They viewed the United States as an imperial and a utilitarian country where material success was more important than the pursuit of beauty and culture.¹⁹ Hence, though they wanted its machines, they elected to use France and Europe instead as the models for their cities. The same quixotic enterprises magnificently portrayed in Werner Herzog's films "Aguirre, the Wrath of God" (1972) and especially in "Fitzcarraldo" (1982), are replicated in the ruling elite's constructions of homes and palaces following French designs and using building materials imported directly from Europe. As time elapsed, there gradually emerged three distinct spaces within one geographic urban area in most Latin America cities: first the well-built, European looking homes and buildings of the rich and the haphazard shantytowns of impecunious immigrants from abroad and peasants and miners who began to abandon the countryside; and later, in the fifties and sixties, myriads of collective housing for an incipient middle class.

Santiago's development is very similar to the one followed by most Latin American capital cities. From the beginning of Chile's history, it quickly became the center of political and economic hegemony even if much of the wealth was not created within its borders. Between the *fin de siècle* and the first decades of the 20th Century, well-to-do families settled in the historic center of the city, where they built beautiful mansions which closely resembled those of France and England. It is in this area where some of Chile's first department stores²⁰ as well as political and cultural institutions were built. Nonetheless, life in Santiago had not changed very much from the portrait of it offered by Alberto Blest Gana in his famous 19th Century novel *Martín Rivas* (1862). One's class, last name, educational background and capital continued to determine where one lived and in what social and cultural activities one became engaged. The opulent, for instance, entertained in their homes, where they frequently welcomed wealthy families from surrounding towns (Valparaíso, Los Andes, San Felipe, etc.). At the same time, they strolled in elegant streets and parks, and they congregated in private clubs and, above all, in the "Teatro Municipal," where being seen was more important than seeing a particular show. For the poor, circumstances were quite different. Most of them victims of a process which Gabriel Salazar calls the "descampesinización" of Chile's countryside starting in the last decades of the 19th Century, they were forced to live confined in shantytowns located at the edge of the historic center without potable water and electricity. In this context, is not surprising that some writers protested against the palpable chasm between rich and poor not only in Santiago but in the country at large. Nicolás Palacios (1858-1927), for example, denounced fiercely the fact that, when it came to economic investments and internal colonization, the government favored foreigners instead of Chileans from middle and poor class sectors. He was a tireless defender of the "roto," a fixture of Chilean social life who, though the maximum incarnation of "la raza chilena," lived in abject poverty and was despised by the elite.²¹ Unlike the "pituco," its aristocratic counterpart, the "roto"²² developed a kind of popular sociability which manifested itself in street dances, the circus and the "zarzuela"²³ in neighborhoods such as San Diego and Estación Central. The only place where the "roto," the "pituco," and members of an inchoate middle class convened, was "la Plaza de Armas," the gathering point for all Santiago tramcars at the time. Once electricity arrived, it was possible to extend transportation systems and thus new neighborhoods such as Ñuñoa and Providencia appeared. Gradually,

¹⁹ In a recent study Oscar Terán calls this attitude "anti-imperialismo espiritualista," an attitude which in his opinion emanates from a Latin American elite intent on claiming for itself a European intellectual heritage threatened by United States' Positivism and Pragmatism. See his "El espiritualismo y la creación del anti-imperialismo latinoamericano."

²⁰ "Gath and Chaves," for example.

²¹ Palacios, a medical doctor by profession, is best known for his *Raza chilena* (1904). Other writers who strongly condemned the country's social ills are Alejandro Venegas (1871-1922), alias "Dr. J. Valdés Canje" (in his *Sinceridad: Chile íntimo en 1910*), and Luis Emilio Recabarren (1876-1924), founder of Chile's Communist Party.

²² The binary "roto/pituco," whose current paradigm is "own/foreign," will continue to play a significant role in the 20th Century but with different names: "developmentalism"/"la vía chilena," "la pérgola/el supermercado," "los muchachos bien/los upelientos."

²³ A Spanish operetta having a spoken dialogue and usually a comic theme.

as hundreds of miners began to leave nitre mines in the north, they moved to the capital and were forced to live in “conventillos.”²⁴ In time, the “Gran Santiago” would emerge and the affluent would begin to leave the historic center toward the mountains, giving birth to neighborhoods such as El Golf, Las Condes, and Vitacura, among others.²⁵

Although it would be unfair to render a uniform picture of the Latin American city today, it is undoubtedly true that many of them have experienced a “loss of their fantastic civic quality” (Duany 82-83) as a direct result of neoliberal policies that have slowly dismantled the protective role of the state. As Alan Gilbert contends, Latin American cities have suffered a process of “northamericanization” (29-30), occasionally bringing with it “urban typologies that are fundamentally anti-pedestrian” (Duany 87). The city as center of civility and national order has turned into “the trope of disorder” par excellence (Franco, *Decline and Fall* 191). Recent studies on violence in Latin American cities offer a rather bleak scenario of urban localities. For Mexican essayist Carlos Monsivais, the modern city has become the place of innumerable “rituales del caos.”²⁶ Mabel Moraña and Beatriz Sarlo, for their part, underscore fear as the most salient feature of public spaces today.²⁷ Martín Hopenhayn refers to drugs and violence as the phantoms of the new Latin American metropolis.²⁸ Colombian cultural critic Jesús Martín-Barbero’s metaphor “discriminación topográfica” (22) that points to the division between affluent and impoverished neighborhoods best encapsulates the overall x-ray of the city which these authors diagram. On the one hand, we find fear of the indigent, the unemployed, the drug addict, and the Other, punctuated by the ever more tenuous nature of social relations and the loss of spontaneous sociability. On the other, we encounter the mall and the gated-community as locales of refuge from the insecurity of the streets evidenced by the mushrooming of security systems and the increasing desire to live in apartments instead of homes. In the end, the traditional Latin American city, what Liernur calls the “contaminated city” (302-03) where rich and poor, white, black, mestizo and indigenous once circulated together, is presently giving way to two markedly different cities. As a result, it would appear that Latin America capital cities are lacking at least two of the three basic, though cardinal, ingredients to guarantee the survival of any city in the age of globalization according to Joel Kotkin’s most recent study:²⁹ “the sacredness of place, [and] the ability to provide security,” respectively (18).

Even though not all literature being written these days in Latin America can be reduced to a characterization of the city,³⁰ in many literary texts across the continent this is the locus where the battle between the local and the global is taking place.³¹ Whether one conceives of globalization as “complex

²⁴ These “conventillos” became known later as “poblaciones callampas,” an expression which conveyed more appropriately the swiftness with which they began to propagate across the city.

²⁵ *Historia del siglo XX chileno* (2001), by Sofía Correa et al, has been extremely useful in the composition of this paragraph.

²⁶ In Moraña’s introduction to *Espacio urbano, comunicación y violencia en América Latina*, p. 10.

²⁷ Ibid. and Sarlo’s essay “Violencia en las ciudades. Una reflexión sobre el caso argentino.”

²⁸ In his study, “Droga y violencia: fantasmas de la nueva metropolis latinoamericana.”

²⁹ “Will Great Cities Survive?”

³⁰ It would be certainly impossible here to provide a complete picture of today’s Latin American literary production. It suffices it to say, however, that among some of the tendencies one finds the following: the detective novel, the unbelievable increase of women writers and the concomitant treatment of gender issues in their works, gay literature and revisionist texts which question traditional representations of history. Influenced by the ever more ubiquitous presence of communication technologies and the media in general, these writers often produce texts which mix discourses coming from popular songs, movies, the internet and others, dissolving thus the old-fashioned facile divide between high, low, mass and popular cultures. What is most interesting is that this happens not only at a time in Latin American history when books are beyond the reach of the majority because of their high price but at a moment in literary theory when some have begun to question the perdurability of literature in the age of the hegemony of the image. On this last point, consult Masiello, Kosak Rovero, Olalquiaga and Freire Filho.

³¹ For some recent examples other than Fuguet’s and Lemebel’s works, consult two novels by Colombian writer Andrés Caicedo, *¡Que viva la música!* and *Calicalabo*, respectively. Also the novel of Caicedo’s compatriot Mario Mendoza, *Scorpio city*. Fresh out of the oven is the interesting collection of short-stories which have Lima as a centerpiece, *Wary by Candlelight: Stories*, written in English by Daniel Alarcón. For a critical assessment of contemporary Caribbean urban novels,

connectivity" (Tomlinson), as "translocalization" or "translation" (Czarniawska 7), as myriads of metaphors and rhetorical devices (Pemberton) which Michael Veseth encapsulates under "globaloney" (22, 62) or as "un objeto cultural no identificado" (García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada* 13), and even if, in the worst case scenario, "grobalization" wins over "glocalization" in the end, the fact is that writers in the continent *are* responding to the drastic transformations undergone by the city in the last fifteen years. As the title of this paper adumbrates, Fuguet and Lemebel provide two diametrically opposed depictions of the city; thus the near implausibility of reading their texts in non-binary ways. They both focus their attention on Santiago, the capital of Chile. Traditionally, Santiago has been divided into two distinct sectors: *el barrio alto*, an area located closer to the Andes mountains and populated by the upper-class and the affluent, and *de Plaza Italia para abajo*, a zone westward of the historic center where the the poor and the middle class live.³² Historically, well-to-do families have moved away from the center toward the mountains, as it was stated above. In recent years, though the traditional *barrio alto* continues to exist, there have arisen extremely expensive developments even closer to the mountains ("La Dehesa," for example). Before delving into his 1991 novel *Mala onda* (*Bad Vibes* [1997]),³³ let us look at some of Fuguet's other works.

The value of Fuguet's *œuvre* resides not only in the fact that he is the first writer in Chile to offer such a clear view of the *barrio alto*'s geographical and social layout, especially in *Mala onda*, but the fact that he is undoubtedly one of the first authors to fictionalize the nascent signs of a society which, having been forced to adopt a new type of economic *modus operandi* – neoliberalism – witnesses the arrival of globalization and its discontents, with its multinationals, its McDonalds, its communication technologies, its cultural industry, and its individualism. As Diana Palaversich observes, Fuguet's works have received scarce attention from the critics (60 [Eltit and Lemebel have received significantly more, particularly in the US academy]). At the same time, certain segments of the Chilean press have called him superficial, light, not Latin American enough. Others have put Fuguet in same category as Marcela Serrano and Isabel Allende (i.e as a producer of market-friendly texts).³⁴ It is true that, as Sarlo avers regarding the current cultural studies debate, the "question of values" is crucial when evaluating literary works ("Cultural Studies" 31). Nevertheless, the merit of Fuguet's works consists foremost of its documentary nature, of the fact that, whether we like or not, he provides a picture of a Chile which is also real.³⁵

see Bruni. For narratives of the contemporary city coming from Ecuador, read Ortega's article. And, finally, regarding a brief historical summary of the representation of the city in various Latin American novels, refer to Almandoz's study.

³² Overall, however, the picture of Santiago's space is much more complex, as there are some pockets of very poor people in the heart of the *barrio alto* for whom it becomes more and more difficult to survive but who have always lived there; and, likewise, as the number of middle class housing projects on the foot of the Andes continues to increase. Similarly, the government has implemented a plan to restore the downtown area. And last but not least, the fact that many wealthy families who in the past opted to live in the *barrio alto*, have now begun to build their homes on the outskirts of Santiago on what used to be farming land.

³³ The son of Chilean parents, Fuguet grew up in California and moved back to Chile in the mid-seventies. After having graduated with a degree in journalism from the Universidad de Chile, he worked in radio and television as a music and movie critic. Without a doubt, he is one of the most visible actors in the media, constantly appearing in newspapers, book fairs, interviews and the web. At present, as a matter of fact, he writes a column for *El Mercurio*'s literary review, "Revista de libros." Among some of his works are *Sobredosis* (1989), a collection of short-stories, *Por favor rebobinar* (1994), a novel, *Cuentos con walkman* (1993) and *McOndo* (1996), two anthologies of short-stories (the latter edited with Sergio Gómez), *Las películas de mi vida* (2003), a novel published simultaneously in Spanish and English, a new though not a widely spread phenomenon in Latin American letters (Gabriel García Márquez' first volume of his memoirs, *Vivir para contarla*, also came out in English and Spanish), and *Cortos* (2004), Fuguet's most recent collection of short-stories. He has also directed a couple of movies.

³⁴ For an appreciation of the "nueva narrativa chilena" other than Cánova's and Cortínez's, consult Espinosa's and Coloma's, "Nueva Narrativa chilena. ¿Y ahora qué?"

³⁵ More recently, in his novel *Barrio alto*, Hernán Rodríguez Matte also attempts to describe the world of the opulent; but unlike *Mala onda*, his work has not received the same type of acclaim.

Although not all of Fuguet's texts provide as distinct a croquis of the city, the great majority of his characters are urban. Moreover, except for his incursion into the detective genre in his novel *Tinta roja* (1996), most of them come from the upper echelons of Chilean society and they represent la *jeunesse dorée* of present day Chile. At the same time, almost all of them are avid listeners of Northamerican and English rock music, they tend to speak English as well as they speak Spanish, they travel abroad -- mostly to the United States, a country they admire and emulate --, and they spend a significant part of their time watching American movies.³⁶ *Sobredosis* (1990), Fuguet's first collection of short-stories, marks the genesis of the "McOndo" journey which will reach its apex in the controversial prologue of *McOndo*. Some of the stylistic and thematic traits which characterize *Mala onda* constitute an integral part of *Sobredosis*. One of the most pivotal as regards the subject of globalization and notions such as *lo propio* and *lo ajeno*, is the confection of an ideology which seeks to extricate Chile from a third world category in which it has traditionally been situated. There is a fervid desire, in fact, to inter "el viejo Chile" and to catapult the new, "modern" one. At the same time, however, there seems to be a disconnect between this desire and reality. If, on the one hand, the daily lives and experiences of the characters are refracted mostly through musical videos and Northamerican films and TV shows -- "*It's hard to give a shit these days*, pensó, citando a Lou Reed" (13)³⁷; "La parte de atrás del centro comercial parecía de *Blade Runner*: puro cemento" (18) --, on the other, there is a patent looking down, a species of inferiority complex regarding things Chilean and Chile's capital: "Santiago es, en el fondo, un pueblo chico" (25); "Ya llevaban como tres días en Santiago y realmente era la nada. La peor ciudad del mundo, el peor país" (41). It is as if what Carlos Alonso calls "the burden of modernity" in reference to 19th Century Latin America were very much alive and kicking in 20th Century literary discourse. Despite this negative diagnosis of Santiago, however, it is still in the *barrio alto* where most of the action takes place; "Providencia," "Lyon," "Apoquindo" and "Las Condes" are some of the streets mentioned by name. It is in this section of the city where the earliest indications of what some perceive as the "northamericanization" of Chile's capital city, and others as the standardization of daily existence brought upon by an inchoate process of globalization, become visible. Upon a cursory look at the first three stories of the collection -- "Deambulando por la orilla oscura," "Amor sobre ruedas" and "Los muertos vivos," for example, one finds a shopping center ("el Apumanque"), eating practices which have come to epitomize the very presence of empire in most world metropolises ("papas fritas ... comida rápida" 15) and English as the lingua franca ("*Welcome to the jungle, it gets worse here everyday*" 16). But it is in *Mala onda*, Fuguet's first novel, where Chile's new image becomes crystalized.

Set days before the referendum on Augusto Pinochet's 1980 constitution, *Mala onda* is a *Buildungsroman*, literally, an "upbringing" or "education" novel, which furnishes an excellent illustration of the existence of two distinct urban spaces in Chile's capital: the nascent "globalized," "northamericanized," "neoliberalized," "deterritorialized" polity of the protagonist and his world which began to take shape during Pinochet's dictatorship in the seventies, and an older, more traditional, more dangerous and patently rooted "Chilean" urban space which Matías Vicuña, the young seventeen-year old protagonist, avoids at all cost. Seminally, this novel represents perhaps the best paradigm for what would eventually become the only model for Chilean society: consumer-oriented comportments, privatized basic services, privatized higher education, privatized health and pension plans and the unrestricted opening to foreign investments. Fuguet's and Matías's *Weltanschauungen* on globalization and North American culture would be readily embraced and glorified by future democratic and even the current socialist governments of Chile. Critic and writer José Leandro Urbina is right to liken Santiago's cultural representation in *Mala onda* to an L. A. suburb or to Manhattan (92). Ultimately, the protagonist's search

³⁶ In *Las películas de mi vida*, no doubt Fuguet's most autobiographical novel so far, Beltrán, the first-person protagonist, reconstructs his existence by reminiscing the movies that have had an impact in his life.

³⁷ In the course of my study, textual citations will be followed by corresponding page number in parenthesis.

for identity takes place exclusively within the cocoon of the *barrio alto*.³⁸ In marked contrast with the rest of the city, this is an area settled mostly by members of the moneyed and the upper-class, as I have already declared. Matías knows this urban cartography like the back of his hand and he feels immensely comfortable in it. There is not a single well-off neighborhood or street that escapes the indefatigable movements of this modern *flâneur*: “El Bosque,” “Apoquindo,” “Las Condes,” “Vitacura,” “Avenida Kennedy,” “El Arrayán.” Some of the typical signposts of globalization which now fill many Latin American metropolitan areas are already present in the landscape of 1980 Santiago: shopping centers, malls, multiplex theatres, gargantuan grocery stores, many with English names: the “Shopping the Vitacura,” the “Pumper Nic,” the “Drugstore,” the “Long Beach.” Tellingly, at some point in the novel, when Matías finds himself in the Pumper Nic and smells the odor of french fries, he utters: “Me gusta. Es el olor de Estados Unidos, ... Olor a progreso” (106-07).

But if there is a physical cartography of Fuguet’s city, there is also a palpable cultural imagery which accompanies it and supports it. In very simplistic terms, this translates into an exaltation of everything that comes from the United States and an utter repudiation of Chilean and Latin American cultures. For example, upon his return from an end of the year school trip to Rio de Janeiro, the protagonist asserts: “Cagué. Estoy de vuelta, estoy en Chile” (37). In this case, it is not a matter of bestowing distinction through taste, as Pierre Bourdieu would have it.³⁹ Rather, the auratic quality of certain North American products, especially music and films, is already assumed. Throughout the entire novel, the adjective “chileno/a” is utilized every time the first person narrating voice wishes to attach a negative quality onto an object or reality. Furthermore, North American and British groups such as the Doors, K.C. and the Sunshine Band, Fleetwood Mac, the Pistols, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Queen and many, many others whose songs the protagonist knows by heart, are contrasted with Chilean and Latin American singers whose songs were banned during Pinochet’s seventeen year long regime; singers such as Violeta Parra, Victor Jara, Mercedes Sosa and Silvio Rodríguez, and groups such as Quilapayún, Intillimani and Los Jaivas. For Matías, who views Chile as a backward and insignificant country, they represent the past.

Although he does not venture into eighty percent of Santiago except at the end of the novel, he does make brief allusions to certain working class neighborhoods such as “Recoleta” and “Gran Avenida,” which he deems abhorrent. Toward the end of his sometimes desperate search of self, our poor protagonist, carrying a bottle of valium and a copy of J. D. Salinger’s novel *The Catcher in the Rye* in his hands, manages to accidentally trespass the limits of the well-to-do areas he knows, feeling completely out of place even in the low middle class locations where the city bus takes him: “No tengo ni idea de dónde me encuentro. Este no es mi territorio” (280). Even more pointedly, he asseverates: “Tengo que salir de aquí, volver a la civilización” (282). After taking a taxi which drops him off downtown, he strolls through Ahumada Street, one of Santiago’s oldest and busiest commercial streets, and makes the following observation: “Un grupo de niñas harapientas juguetea y revisa los tarros de basura” (288). Then, walking through a different part of the heart of the historical area, he avers: “El barrio éste es infinitamente más antiguo y dejado de la mano de Dios que el resto del centro” (297). Subsequently, Matías buys a copy of *Village Voice*, eats at a Burger Inn and, making use of his perfect English, passes himself off as an American in order to get a room in a hotel. The following day, as demonstrations and disorder rage in the streets as an aftermath of Pinochet’s triumph, he and his grandfather, whom he meets by chance in the “Café Haití,” take refuge in the “Club de la Unión,” one of Chile’s oldest and most prestigious private clubs. At the end of the novel, this rebel without a cause reconciles himself with his rich father by spending a night with a couple of call girls, and he accepts without a fight, the entrenchment of Pinochet’s dictatorship.

³⁸ It is indeed not easy to translate this phrase. Literally, it means “high neighborhood.” Geographically speaking, this is an area far away from the center of the city and closer to the Andes Mountains, as it was already stated.

³⁹ See *La distinction. Critique social du jugement*.

In Fuguet's second novel, *Por favor, rebobinar* (1994), where a "micro-social analysis" of Fuguet's own generation is carried out (O' Connell 33), Matías's personal search for meaning is repeated by all the first person character-narrators which comprise the text: Lucas, Ignacia, Julián, Andoni, Damián, Cox and Gonzalo, all young adults rather than adolescents. Furthermore, the "rebobinar" of the title does not mean delving into Chile's past to understand the present but, rather, immersing oneself into one's own cocoon to heal emotionally in the *hic et nunc*. In spite of the fact that the dictatorship is over and that the country is now a "democracy," the adventure keeps on being solipsistic. The arrival of the "transición" does not signify the going back to pre-1973 collective comportments but instead the gradual eroding of community. Hence, it should come as no surprise that in his now famous defense "I am not a Magic Realist" (1997), Fuguet may avow, "I feel the great literary theme of Latin American identity (who are we?) must now take a back seat to the theme of personal identity (who am I?)." Or, as Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat has argued, the change of "virtual reality for magic realism, individual identity for cultural identity, and the global village (with its consumer society and 'mediasphere') for the local village." The world of the characters in *Por favor, rebobinar* is that of a labyrinth of solitude in which the denizens of the metropolis have been transformed into the orphans of the global village. Neither the Nation State nor the military apparatus are there to supply guidance. In the last section of the novel, "Adulto contemporáneo", Gonzalo offers a retrospective assessment of the lives of his friends by affirming tellingly: "Sabíamos que Santiago estaba lleno de gente rara, sola, que necesitaba conectarse, sentirse parte de algo porque, de alguna manera, éramos como ellos. Y no nos sentíamos parte" (295). Citizenship, in the neoliberal state which is now in place, must be constructed individually, not politically, as politics has become the politics of the spectacle. But to design this postnational, postpolitical, globally-oriented citizenship it becomes imperative to commence anew, as if messy historical events bore absolutely no relationship to the present. It is no accident, therefore, that Lucas should emit the following statement in the first section of Fuguet's text, "Una estrella-y-media": "Creo que debería empezar a planear mi futuro, puesto que el futuro va a estar conmigo el resto de mi vida, no así el pasado que, con un poco de suerte y un poco de esfuerzo, perfectamente podré exterminarlo de mi sistema. Ese es mi primer objetivo futurista: borrar el pasado" (14). It is no wonder that Edmundo Paz-Soldán sees the novel as the endorsement of the neoliberal moment (45). From *Sobredosis* to *Mala onda* to *Por favor, rebobinar* there has not been a substantive change in Fuguet's *Weltanschauung*. *Lo propio* is still defined in terms of *lo ajeno* and "el viejo Chile" continues to be an entity to be overcome: "Si bien nunca he pisado los Estados Unidos, me encantaría que la película sobre la historia de mi vida se filmara en USA, con actores yanquis. No toleraría que se filmara acá en Chile ... Podría ambientarse en un pueblecito del norte de California o en una caleta de Nueva Inglaterra" (60); "Bien. Bastante bien. Casi perfecto, para ser chileno" (126). Denizens of the *barrio alto* for the most part – Santa María de Manqueue, Providencia, Las Condes, La Dehesa, etc. --, the characters of Fuguet's second novel feel contempt and look askance at certain traditional Santiago neighborhoods: Santo Domingo and La Cisterna, for example. What they disdain, ultimately, are cultural habits and customs which, from their perspective, are not in harmony with the new Chile: "para ustedes, en cambio, estar allí era el sueño de la familia, el orgullo de esos tíos que llegaban los domingos en micro y armaban el asado y después partían en masa al fútbol" (130). Analogously, it must be said that Fuguet's world is white, and that those with indigenous physical attributes are usually represented in a bad light: "En eso llegó otro tipo, bajito y lleno de acné, con el pelo tieso y un horroroso chaleco tejido a mano color caqui" (167).

This world, the world of "los de abajo," the world of those who have not reaped the benefits of Chile's economic miracle, is the one that Lemebel indefatigably attempts to describe. Like Carlos Monsivais in *Días de guardar* (1970), *Los rituales del caos* (1995) and other urban chronicles, Lemebel unveils the cryptic, unnoticed aspects of a Chilean culture which is very much alive but chiefly ignored by official representations. Though he recognizes the Mexican intellectual as an important influence in his own critical and literary efforts, he is less humorous and certainly less sanguine as regards his country's future. His work incarnates the very resistance to the global and the passionate rescuing of an evanescent

Chilean identity.⁴⁰ He is also the first writer in Chile to forcefully and valiantly inscribe gay identity in a predominantly racist and homophobic public sphere. Generally speaking, he accomplishes two things: a) he devises what could be called a poetics of gayhood from the underground and b) he criticizes unmercifully the violation of human rights perpetrated during Pinochet's regime as well as chastises the ensuing democratic governments in Chile not only for having left almost intact the economic and legal apparatuses repressively installed by the military but, what is worse, for having imposed a *Weltanschauung* in which, to paraphrase García Canclini, citizens have no choice but to become consumers.⁴¹ At a time in Chilean history in which international organizations do not cease to tout Chile as the most secure, the most business-friendly and the least corruption-prone country in Latin America, Lemebel does not desist from his endeavors to depict marginalized human and urban locales which have either fallen victim to the logic of the free market or simply refuse to embrace it. Unlike Fuguet, Lemebel writes chronicles for the most part.⁴² Here I will analyze *De perlas y cicatrices* (1997) and *Zanjón de la Aguada* (2003). I do not make reference to *La esquina es mi corazón: crónica urbana* (1995) or to *Loco afán. Crónicas de sidario* (1996) because they have received much more critical attention than the former two.⁴³

In the context of “the global” and “the local” as pertains the contemporary Latin American metropolis, Lemebel stands at the opposite pole of Fuguet as he conceives *lo propio* not as *lo ajeno* or “Northeamerican” but as the stubbornly “Chilean” at a moment when this very notion would seem to be fading away. In a recent interview, in fact, he places Fuguet, who in his opinion ascribes to a “modelo norteamericano,” at the top of a list of Chilean novelists whom he calls “narradores neoliberales” (Lemebel, “La figura” 26-27). As in his first two collections of chronicles, in *De perlas y cicatrices* the space in which the *flâneur* moves is located predominantly *de Plaza Italia para abajo*. Among the manifold places to which he alludes, are the following: Maipú, Matucana, Estación Central, San Camilo, Lira and El Paseo Ahumada. Poignantly, in the chronicle “Nevada de plumas sobre un tigre en invierno” the chronicler asseverates in no uncertain terms that only the well-to-do, that is, those in the *barrio alto* living closest to the mountains, are able to see the snow. As we saw earlier, this is the territory of most of Fuguet's characters. The importance of this chronicle lies in the fact that, like Fuguet (though in reverse) he wishes to underscore Santiago's dual geography or, as it becomes increasingly evident in many Latin American metropolises, narrate a tale of two cities, two cities within the same urban landscape, Rama's “ciudad ideal” on the one hand, and Alberto Flores Galindo's “ciudad sumergida” (or Rama's “ciudad real”) on the other:⁴⁴ “Por suerte la nieve es del Barrio Alto y que siga nevando allá que tienen techos firmes. Porque aquí ya es mucho soportar los aguaceros, las alcantarillas tapadas y los mojones chapoteando en el chocolate de la inundación. Ya es mucho barro y la lluvia deja de ser poética, cuando

⁴⁰ Lemebel started his career in the eighties as a member of an artistic group (“Las yeguas del Apocalipsis”) that was involved in photography, videos, installations and *performances*. He also works in radio, where he reads texts which later become written urban chronicles. Besides his collection of short-stories *Incontables* (1986), he has published the following set of chronicles so far: *La esquina es mi corazón: crónica urbana* (1995), *Loco afán. Crónicas de sidario* (1996), *De perlas y cicatrices* (1997), *Zanjón de la Aguada* (2004) and *Adiós mariquita linda* (2005).

⁴¹ See *Consumidores y ciudadanos. Conflictos multiculturales de la globalización*.

⁴² But he has also published a beautifully written novel called *Tengo miedo torero* (2001) which relates the love story between a *loca* and a member of the leftist group “Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez” who attempts to assassinate Pinochet in 1986. In the novel, the *Loca del Frente*, the gay protagonist, lives in one of Santiago's poorest neighborhoods. Since he makes a living sewing for families with close ties to the military regime who live in the *barrio alto*, he frequently traverses the city in long bus rides, registering all the physical and social changes between this sector and those located *de Plaza Italia para abajo*.

⁴³ For two very thorough analyses of *La esquina es mi corazón. Crónica urbana*, read Guerra Cunningham and Poblete. *Reinas de otro cielo. Modernidad y autoritarismo en la obra de Pedro Lemebel*, edited by Fernando A. Blanco, contains four excellent studies on Lemebel's crónicas as well as on his *performances* from a communication and gender theories standpoint.

⁴⁴ In her introduction to *Más allá de la ciudad letrada. Crónicas y espacios urbanos* (2003), Silvia Spitta, besides providing an excellent critical overview of the Latin American city, rescues from oblivion Alberto Flores Galindo's fascinating study, *La ciudad sumergida: Aristocracia y plebe en Lima, 1760-1830*, by establishing a critical dialogue with Rama's now canonical analysis, *La ciudad letrada*. In Spitta's judgment, though the latter is much better known, it is Flores Galindo's study which is more suitable to approach the “disorderly” state of the urban spaces in Latin America today.

se desborda el canal y arrastra los cuatro palos de la ranca ...” (194).⁴⁵ Considering “Las floristas de La Pérgola,” the last chronicle of *De perlas y cicatrices*, Luis E. Cárcamo-Huechante has written that in this chronicle Lemebel “interrumpe la universalidad del Mercado” (106). Lemebel’s total output, in fact, could be conceived as a perennial venture on the part of the chronicler to demystify the market, both by showing its tangible shortcomings, as in “Nevada de plumas...” and other chronicles, and by erecting a sort of poetics of the subaltern who resists it.

There are two chronicles in this collection which graphically delineate the schizophrenic nature of what Lemebel calls “la ciudad hipócrita” (137): “Flores plebeyas (o ‘el enterrado verdor del jardín proleta’)” and “La comuna de Lavín (o ‘el pueblecito se llamaba Las Condes’).” Availing ourselves of Lucía Guerra Cunningham’s terminology borrowed from one of Lemebel’s own chronicles, it could be claimed that the first constitutes a partial depiction of the “ciudad anal” while the second portrays the “ciudad neoliberal” in its full splendor (Guerra Cunningham 86). For this critic the “ciudad anal” is the city that lives at the margins and in the borders of the “ciudad neoliberal,” cryptically but no less buoyantly. Others assert that Lemebel’s texts in general “hilan una etnografía poética del margen chileno en la ciudad” (Blanco 57). Interestingly, the point of comparison here are not habits of consumption or the difference between the “*nación-mercado*” (Cárcamo-Huechante 99) celebrated by Lemebel versus the shopping mall as the “machine of amnesia” repudiated by Sarlo but rather nature itself. For even nature, the lack or abundance of water in this case, has different effects depending on which zone of the city one inhabits. The “paisaje desolado” and the “tierrales desérticos” of “Flores plebeyas” (165) stands in direct contrast to the “jardincitos recortados” and the “vergel clasista” of “La comuna de Lavín” (169). But if in the latter chronicle the narrator ironizes incessantly, in the former there stands out a respect, a paean not only to a green world which fights for its life at every stretch but also to “mujeres sencillas que insisten con transplantar el aroma para que la pelota de la pichanga callejera no lo destruya” (165). Nature’s exceedingly precarious condition in this “eriazó polvoriento” (165) in places such as “Carrascal,” “Pudahuel” or “La Victoria,” some of Santiago’s most poverty-stricken *barrios*, corresponds symbolically to the daily struggle for existence of the inhabitants of the chronicler’s “ciudad furtiva” (Franco, “Estudio,” en Blanco 14): “Solamente resisten esta fobia a lo natural, algunas plantas espinudas que se agarran de las piedras salvajes y hostiles, extrayendo la gota húmeda de alguna cañería rota, o del canal hediondo que pasa cerca” (165). Toward the end of “Flores plebeyas,” la “ciudad neoliberal” is reduced metonymically to “un prado de hojas plásticas y ramas sintéticas” (166), underscoring its artificial nature on the one hand and making an indirect connection between “hojas plásticas” and credit cards -- the very tool of consumption -- on the other. The two distinct faces of the Latin American city, el “paisaje callampa” and “el barrio alto” (166), the collective habits of pauperized neighborhoods versus the competitive behaviors of prosperous ones, are so magnificently depicted in the last paragraph that it is worth quoting it in its entirety:

Pero este cuidado invernadero que divide la ciudad en metros de pasto recortado y callejones de tierra seca, pareciera un prado de hojas plásticas y ramas sintéticas, demasiado cuidado, demasiado fumigado por la mano burguesa que encierra y educa sus bellas flores tristes. Flores que nacieron para competir con la azalea del jardín vecino. Flores obligadas a ser bellas y orgullo del palacete donde crecen y se multiplican con el permiso del jardinero. En cambio, las otras, las que porque sí en el piedral inhóspito de la pobla, plantuchas que parecen reptiles agarradas al polvo, ramas que trepan por los andamios de la pobreza, para producir el milagro que acuarela de color el horizonte blanco y negro del margen, con sus porfiadas flores de fango (166).

The chronicle “La comuna de Lavín” comes immediately after “Flores plebeyas” although it heads the subsequent section of the text, “Relamido frenesí.” If “Flores plebeyas” constitutes a kind of pageant

⁴⁵ In “La inundación” (140-41), Lemebel describes in detail how the floods affect the lives and homes of the poor.

to the *ciudad callampa*, “La comuna de Lavín” is a denunciation of the hubris of the “ciudad neoliberal.” Nature, here, does not survive because of the persevering endeavors of women but due to the overflowing of capital wanting in the *ciudad callampa*. Specifically speaking, Lemebel recounts the story of when Lavín, at the time mayor of Las Condes, made it possible that it rain during a period of severe drought in the city: “Todo se puede comprar con plata, hasta una simple lluvia ... Comuníqueme rápido [he orders his secretary] con mis amigos de la Fuerza Aérea para pedirles que nos bombardeen el cielo con lluvia deshidratada” (170). For anyone knowing Chile’s recent history, of course, it cannot go unnoticed that it was also the “Fuerza Aérea” which on September 11, 1973, bombarded La Moneda – Chile’s presidential palace – ushering in a seventeen year dictatorship. It cannot go unnoticed, either, not only that Lavín – who “lleva el panderito en la organización feudal del condominio chileno” (169) -- belongs to Chile’s most socially and economically conservative party, but that he himself was one of the pillars of Pinochet’s economic team. Perhaps because in some measure he represents the very essence of the “ciudad neoliberal,” the narrator describes him in the most sarcastic of terms: “derechista con sonrisa eucarística que hizo la primera comunión en el Opus Dei ... alcalde con cara de hostia, el colmo de santurrón, ... su optimismo de boy scout de plaza” (169). Physically, Lemebel establishes a patent distinction between Lavín’s city -- “merengue enrejado ... idilio de comuna, donde todo el mundo es feliz” (169) -- and what Bernardita Llanos, fittingly, has recently called “la ciudad-basura” typical of the “erial” in Lemebel’s chronicles (92). “[L]a cancha de fútbol, ... el jardín popular, ... las barandas de los bloques tiritones, ... los terrales desérticos que rodean Santiago” (165) of “Flores plebeyas,” where there is high unemployment, high levels of crime, drug consumption, etc., stands in contradistinction to the supposedly perfect world of Las Condes: “El emperifollado Barrio Alto, sembrado de torres y experimentos arquitectónicos, edificios cuadrados y piramidales, como maquetas de espejos para saciar la imagen narcisa y garantizada del Chile actual” (169). In Lemebel’s *Weltanschauung* of Chile, therefore, there is an unsurmountable rift between these two cities within the same city. But as Héctor Domínguez remarks, he refuses to make a deal with this “amnesia terapéutica por el bien del mercado” (123), thus his virulent attacks against Lavín, the *barrio alto* and neoliberal policies at the end of the chronicle:

Así, la fruncida comuna de Las Condes es una reina rubia que mira por sobre el hombro a otras comunas piojosas de Santiago, la estirada y palo grueso comuna de Las Condes, prima hermana de Providencia y compañera de curso en las monjas con Vitacura y La Dehesa, marca un alto rating en el firulí del status urbano. Es el ejemplo de un sistema económico que se pasa por el año la justicia social, es la evidencia vergonzosa de un nuevo feudalismo de castillos, condominios y poblaciones humildes que hierven de faltas y miserias, de habitantes tristes y habitantes frívolos y cómodos que lucen el esplendor de sus perlas cultivadas por el exceso neoliberal (170).

In *Zanjón de la Aguada* (2003), his forth cluster of urban chronicles, Lemebel puts forward the most thorough portrait yet of neighborhoods located *de Plaza Italia para abajo*. The title of this essayistic corpus, in effect, refers to the place where Lemebel himself was born, “el Zanjón de la Aguada,” one of Santiago’s most destitute places. The text as a whole is replete with expressions which stand diametrically opposed to the image of Chile and Santiago that official discourses foster: “los viaductos de la urbe controlada” (43), “la selva urbana” (49), los “barrios bajos” (53), “este hoyo asfixiante que es Santiago” (80), “esta urbe infame” (89), “esos hospitales de la caridad pública” (104), “este Santiago fome, gris y apunado por las deudas” (213), and so on. But if this list of expressions epitomizes the feelings of the author apropos the city, there is a complementary list which completes this imagery: “las casas de los ricos” (68), “la juventud exitista, conservadora e idiotizada por la navidad consumista de los malls, shopping y centros comerciales del Miami chileno” (70), “[el] estatus neoliberal de la democracia” (76), etc. Lemebel the literal *flâneur* and his recalcitrant gaze of contemporary Santiago do not leave aside almost any indigent and working class location: “Gran Avenida,” “Las Rejas,” “El barrio Brasil,” “El barrio Dieciocho,” “El Mercado Persa,” “La Estación Central,” “Franklin,”

“La Vega,” “La Plaza de Armas,” “Arturo Prat,” “San Diego.” In these odes to the outcasts and misfits of the Latin American metropolis, he rescues from oblivion ragged children who live in the streets, prostitutes, young unemployed soccer fans, gays, transvestites, women who fought against the repression of the military regime and several other marginalized groups. Of the fifty chronicles which make up the text, there are two which express in no uncertain terms Lemebel’s utter condemnation of the new Chile: “Socorro, me perdí en un mall (O, ¿tiene parche curita?),” and “Sanhattan (O el vértigo arribista de soñarse en Nueva York).” In the first, the author goes to a mall, “esos aeropuertos del consumismo” (209), guarded by a racist cadre of policemen, to buy a simple band aid on a holiday. Unable to find one, he leaves what he calls “ese laberinto de ilusiones” (212) with the impression of having been simultaneously in Miami, Hollywood, Disneyworld, Manhattan and Tokyo (212). In the second, he disapprovingly describes a certain sector of the *barrio alto* whose inhabitants never have to venture into *de Plaza Italia para abajo* because they have their own multiplex theatres, gymnasiums, shopping centers and universities. What Lemebel condemns, ultimately, is that “esta nueva capital de cartón” (217) is no more than a poor copy of Manhattan infested by an arrogant people who excludes all those who are not like them.

In the end, however, both our discussion of Fuguet’s and Lemebel’s works as well as our examination of García Canclini, Sarlo and Ortiz’s ideas relative to the *lo propio/lo ajeno* debate, attest to the utter impossibility of reaching a conclusive conclusion with respect to the impact of globalization in Latin America in general and in the Latin American city in particular. Ricoeur’s paradox, fifty one years later, still holds for most countries in the world, but especially for Latin America. Globalization, for all the critical attention it has received in the last fifteen years, continues to be an inscrutable, unfathomable creature. To get out of this straitjacket, might it not be time to speak of “globalizations,” in the plural, in the same way that one speaks of “modernities”? If we take Chile, for instance, we could conceivably say that it is more “globalized” than Haiti. But is it more “globalized” than Brazil or Argentina? If we go back to the representations of Chile and Santiago presented in Fuguet’s and Lemebel’s texts, we shall reach the conclusion that the former emphasizes the global while the latter underscores the local. Nonetheless, as García Canclini and Ortiz make clear, locating the fine line that separates the global from the local as well as the national from the transnational is no longer attainable. Similarly, can the *barrio alto* really constitute the global when it represents a very small minority of Chile’s population? And, likewise, can the margin stand for the local when comprising such a significant portion of the country’s inhabitants? I concur with Ortiz that we have reached a state of “sociedades globalizadas” and “culturas mundializadas.” The global is here to stay, however we read it. But neither Fuguet’s nor Lemebel’s city symbolizes today’s Latin American urban landscape accurately. From this angle, neither *globalization* nor *glocalization* would be entirely appropriate precepts in the understanding of what is going on in the Latin American metropolis at present. Furthermore, it might be time to start better defining “the local” instead of spending so much energy trying to comprehend “the global” (the French and Dutch refusal of the European Constitution come to mind; also the recent election of Evo Morales in Bolivia). This does not mean that we should stop trying to understand the various aspects of globalization, especially those that pertain to its economic impacts on Latin American countries. In fact, it is here, in the economic realm of globalization, in the dictates emanating from the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, sundry multinationals which often benefit themselves and a few wealthy nationals and governments which do not provide the minimum protections for its national industries, that the true danger lies. That is why developing and poor nations in the continent must be vigilant, especially with respect to their developed counterparts. In January, 2006, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Renato Ruggiero, the first director-general of the World Trade Organization, declared: “We are no longer writing the rules of interaction among separate national economies. We are writing *the constitution of a single global economy*.” (Emphasis added)” (Faux 18). Those who envision globalization as the equal exchange of goods and services and not yet another, fancier word for colonization and exploitation, heed these words!

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